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REMOTE EDUCATION SYSTEM, ATTENDANCE CONFIRMATION METHOD, AND
ATTENDANCE CONFIRMATION PROGRAM

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a remote education system which enables education to be conducted over distances 10 using bi-directional communication involving multimedia including video and audio, and more particularly, the present invention relates to a remote education system which has an attendance confirmation function for confirming whether a legitimate student is in attendance, an attendance 15 confirmation method, and an attendance confirmation program.

2. Description of the Related Art

Recently, with advances in communication technology, remote education systems have begun to be implemented which 20 use bi-directional communication based on multimedia, including video and audio, to allow a student to obtain an education over distances via communication lines.

Such remote education systems are to be authorized as a valid means of education. However, to authorize acquisition of

units and accreditation of qualifications, confirmation of student attendance must be accurately performed.

In particular, in remote education, there are cases where there is one lecturer for a large number of students, or where 5 the student attends a programmed in an autonomous manner. For these reasons, a student attendance confirmation method that does not rely upon human resources is required.

A conventional method of confirming the attendance of a student is an audio-visual authentication method, as disclosed 10 in PCT Republished International Publication No. WO 00-59226, for example. In this system, the broadcast program provider displays a unique viewing confirmation code to the viewer at a specific time, and in response, the viewer transmits the viewing confirmation code, which is input from the audio- 15 visual terminal, to the audio-visual authentication system together with the input time, and the audio-visual authentication system then determines whether or not the viewer actually watched the program based on the transmitted viewing confirmation code and input time.

20 However, although such a conventional audio-visual authentication system uses the input viewing confirmation code and the time information to determine whether a viewer has viewed a program, this only allows the system to confirm that a viewer has viewed the program, but there is no assurance 25 that the viewer is the legitimate registered student.

Accordingly, if the legitimate student asks a third person to attend, for example, attendance is recorded as if the legitimate student were in attendance. Furthermore, when a student takes an examination using the remote education system, 5 the legitimate student can easily ask a third person to take the examination.

On the other hand, conventional methods of confirming that the student is the legitimate registered student include a password authentication method in which the student inputs a 10 pre-registered password, a personal information question confirmation method in which the student is asked a question about pre-registered personal information, an image matching method in which an image is taken of the face of the student and matched to a pre-registered image of the face of the 15 student, and an audio matching method in which audio of the student is captured and matched to pre-registered audio of the student.

However, in the case of the password authentication and personal information question confirmation methods, by simply 20 informing a third person of his or her password or personal information, the legitimate student can still ask the third person to attend instead of the legitimate student.

Furthermore, even in the case of the image matching method and the audio matching method, it is still possible for 25 a third person to attend instead of the legitimate student, if

the person who receives the attendance confirmation request sends pre-recorded video or pre-recorded audio of the legitimate student from the terminal.

Thus, conventional attendance confirmation methods 5 present a problem in that it is possible for a legitimate student to intentionally ask a third person to attend instead of the legitimate student, and it is difficult to verify that the legitimate student is actually in attendance.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

To overcome the problems described above, preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a remote education system which, in the context of remote education, prevents substitute attendance of a third person from using 15 pre-recorded video or audio, and which enables confirmation that the legitimate student is in attendance.

A remote education system according to a first preferred embodiment enables education over distances using multimedia bi-directional communication, including video and audio, 20 including student video acquisition means for acquiring video of the student, facial image matching means for matching the video acquired by the student video acquisition means with a pre-registered facial image of the student, action request means for requesting the student to perform an action, and 25 action detection means for detecting the action performed by

the student on the basis of image changes in the video of the student acquired by the student video acquisition means, thereby providing the system for confirming that the legitimate student is in attendance.

5 Because video of the student transmitted from the student terminal is acquired by the student video acquisition means, and this acquired video of the student is matched with a pre-registered facial image of the student, it is possible to confirm that the acquired video is video of the legitimate student. Furthermore, because the student is requested to

10 perform an action by the action request means, and the actions of the student are then detected by the action detection means, on the basis of image changes in the acquired video of the student, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee,

15 because the image changes corresponding to the action request does not occur if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using prerecorded video, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

Examples of the actions that the student is requested to

20 perform by the action request means include any action that causes changes in the acquired video, and suitable examples include moving the head, closing the eyes, moving the mouth, or raising a hand.

A remote education system according to a second preferred

25 embodiment is a remote education system according to the first

preferred embodiment, wherein the action request means includes a function for requesting that the student moves the position of his or her face, and the action detection means includes a function for detecting whether the position of the 5 face of the student has moved.

Because the action request means requests the student to move the position of his or her face, and the movement of the student's face position is then detected by the action detection means, on the basis of the image changes in the 10 acquired video, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because the position of the face does not move as instructed if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using pre-recorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be 15 confirmed.

A remote education system according to a third preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to either one of the first and second preferred embodiments, wherein the action request means includes a function for asking the 20 student a question and requesting an audio response, and the action detection means includes a function for acquiring audio of the student, a function for recognizing the audio response from the acquired audio, a function for determining the validity of the audio response of the student from the 25 recognized audio response, and a function for detecting

movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response by the student.

Because the action request means asks the student a question and requests an audio response, and the action detection means acquires audio of the student, recognizes the audio response, and determines the validity of the audio response from the student, while also detecting the movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response from image changes in the acquired video, confirmation can be obtained that the student determined to be the legitimate student by the facial image matching means has provided the audio response to the question, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

A remote education system according to a fourth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to the third preferred embodiment, wherein the action detection means includes a function for matching the audio response of the student with pre-registered audio of the student.

Because the audio response of the student is matched to pre-registered audio of the student by the action detection means, voice matching of the student is performed in addition to face matching, which allows the attendance of the legitimate student to be confirmed even more reliably.

A remote education system according to a fifth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to the third

or the fourth preferred embodiment, wherein the action request means includes a function for asking the student a question relating to time and requesting an audio response, and the action detection means includes a function for determining the 5 validity of the time given in response by the student.

Because the student is asked a question relating to time by the action request means, and the action detection means then determines the validity of the time given in response by the student, while also detecting the movement of the mouth of 10 the student accompanying the audio response from image changes in the acquired video, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because a third person cannot provide an audio response to the question relating to time if the legitimate student asks the third person to be a substitute attendee 15 using prerecorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

For example, the question relating to time may be a request for the student to provide an audio response including the current time, and the validity of the time provided as an 20 audio response by the student may then be determined by comparing the current time to the time obtained by performing speech recognition of the audio response of the student.

A remote education system according to a sixth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to any one 25 of the third through fifth preferred embodiments, wherein the

action request means includes a function for asking a question relating to personal information of the student and requesting an audio response, and the action detection means includes a function for matching the personal information given by the 5 student with pre-registered personal information relating to that student.

Because the student is asked a question about his or her personal information by the action request means, and the action detection means then matches the personal information 10 given by the student with pre-registered personal information relating to that student, while also detecting the movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response from image changes in the acquired video, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because a third person cannot provide 15 an audio response to the question relating to personal information if the legitimate student asks the third person to be a substitute attendee using prerecorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

20 The personal information of the student requested as an audio response is preferably selected at random from a plurality of pre-registered items of personal information. By doing this, a substitute attendee cannot predict the answer in advance, and it is possible to confirm that the legitimate 25 student is in attendance with even greater reliability.

A remote education system according to a seventh preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to any one of the first through sixth preferred embodiments, wherein the action detection means includes a function for 5 determining that the facial image of the student does not move in a discontinuous manner.

According to this preferred embodiment, because it is possible to detect discontinuous positional changes in the facial image that occur when a third person attendee switches 10 the video sent from the terminal to a prerecorded video in response to an action request, it is possible to prevent a substitute attendee by a third person with greater certainty, and confirm the attendance of the legitimate student with even greater reliability.

15 A remote education system according to an eighth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to any one of the first through seventh preferred embodiments, wherein the action detection means has a function for determining whether image changes occur within a specified 20 time of the action request means requesting the student to perform an action.

According to this preferred embodiment, it is possible to determine non-attendance of the legitimate student if the required image changes do not occur within a predetermined 25 time of the action being requested. Accordingly, even assuming

that it were possible to generate video and the like corresponding to the action request at the terminal, the substitute attendee can be denied sufficient time to prepare such video, and it is therefore possible to confirm that the 5 legitimate student is in attendance with even greater certainty.

A remote education system according to a ninth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to any of the first through eighth preferred embodiments, wherein the 10 action request means has a function for using unpredictable timing when requesting the student to perform an action.

According to this preferred embodiment, because the student cannot predict when an action request will occur, the student cannot leave the student terminal during a lecture, 15 which works as an incentive to ensure that the student is continuously in attendance throughout the entire lecture.

A remote education system according to a tenth preferred embodiment is a remote education system according to any one of the first through ninth preferred embodiments, wherein the 20 action request means has a function for requesting the student to perform an action based on a command by the lecturer.

According to this preferred embodiment, because the lecturer can control the timing with which action requests are issued to students, attendance confirmation can be performed 25 without adversely impacting the learning of the student.

An attendance confirmation method according to an eleventh preferred embodiment is a method of confirming whether a legitimate student is in attendance in a remote education setting, including the steps of acquiring video of 5 the student, matching the acquired video with a pre-registered facial image of the student, requesting the student to perform an action, and detecting the action by the student on the basis of image changes in the acquired video.

Because video of the student sent from the student 10 terminal is acquired during the step of acquiring video of the student, and the acquired video of the student is matched with a pre-registered facial image of the student in the step of matching the pre-registered facial image of the student, it is possible to confirm that the acquired video is video of the 15 legitimate student. Furthermore, because the student is requested to perform an action during the step of requesting an action, and the actions of the student are then detected in the step of detecting an action, on the basis of image changes in the acquired video of the student, it is possible to detect 20 a substitute attendee, because the image changes corresponding to the action request do not occur if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using prerecorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

25 Examples of the action requested of the student in the

step of requesting an action include any action that causes changes in the acquired video, and suitable examples include moving the head, closing the eyes, moving the mouth, or raising a hand.

5 An attendance confirmation method according to a twelfth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to the eleventh preferred embodiment, wherein the step of requesting an action includes a step of requesting that the student move the position of his or her face, and the 10 step of detecting the action includes a step of detecting whether the position of the face of the student has moved.

Because the student is requested to move his or her face during the step of requesting an action, and the movement of the student's face position is then detected in the step of 15 detecting the action, on the basis of image changes in the acquired video, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because the position of the face will not move as instructed if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using pre-recorded video or the like, and 20 thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

An attendance confirmation method according to a thirteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to either one of the eleventh and twelfth 25 preferred embodiments, wherein the step of requesting an

action includes a step of asking the student a question and requesting an audio response, and the step of detecting the action includes a step of acquiring audio of the student, a step of performing recognition of the audio response from the acquired audio, a step of determining the validity of the audio response of the student from the recognized audio response, and a step of detecting movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response of the student.

Because the student is asked a question and requested to provide an audio response during the step of requesting an action, and then during the subsequent step of detecting the action, audio of the student is acquired, the audio response is subjected to recognition, and the validity of that audio response is determined, while movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response is also detected from image changes in the acquired video, confirmation can be obtained that the student determined to be the legitimate student in the step of matching the pre-registered facial image of the student has provided the audio response to the question, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

An attendance confirmation method according to a fourteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to the thirteenth preferred embodiment, wherein the step of detecting the action includes a step of

matching the audio response of the student with pre-registered audio of the student.

Because the audio response of the student is matched with pre-registered audio of the student in the step of detecting 5 the action, voice matching of the student is performed in addition to facial image matching, and the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed with even greater reliability.

An attendance confirmation method according to a 10 fifteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to either one of the thirteenth and fourteenth preferred embodiments, wherein the step of requesting an action includes a step of asking the student a question relating to time and requesting an audio response, 15 and the step of detecting the action includes a step of determining the validity of the time given in response by the student.

Because the student is asked a question relating to time in the step of requesting an action, and in the subsequent 20 step of detecting the action, the validity of the time given in response by the student is determined, while detecting the movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response on the basis of image changes in the acquired video, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because the 25 third person cannot provide a requested response to the

question relating to time if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using prerecorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

5 For example, the question relating to time may be a request for the student to provide an audio response including the current time, and the validity of the time provided as an audio response by the student may be determined by comparing the current time to the time obtained by performing speech
10 recognition of the audio response of the student.

An attendance confirmation method according to a sixteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to any one of the thirteenth through fifteenth preferred embodiments, wherein the step of requesting an action includes a step of asking a question relating to personal information of the student and requesting an audio response, and the step of detecting the action includes a step of matching the personal information given in response by the student with pre-registered personal
15 information relating to that student.

The student is asked a question about his or her personal information in the step of requesting an action, and in the subsequent step of detecting the action, the personal information given in response by the student is matched with
20 pre-registered personal information relating to that student,

and the movement of the mouth of the student accompanying the audio response is detected on the basis of image changes in the acquired video. Consequently, it is possible to detect a substitute attendee, because the third person cannot provide 5 an audio response to the question relating to personal information if the legitimate student asks a third person to be a substitute attendee using pre-recorded video or the like, and thus, the attendance of the legitimate student can be confirmed.

10 The personal information of the student requested as an audio response is preferably selected at random from a plurality of pre-registered items of personal information. By doing this, a substitute attendee cannot predict the answer in advance, and it is possible to confirm that the legitimate 15 student is in attendance with even greater reliability.

An attendance confirmation method according to a seventeenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to any one of the eleventh through sixteenth preferred embodiments, wherein the step of detecting the 20 action includes a step of determining that the facial image of the student does not move in a discontinuous manner.

According to this preferred embodiment, because it is possible to detect discontinuous positional changes in the facial image that occur when a third person attendee switches 25 the video sent from the terminal to a prerecorded video in

response to an action request, it is possible to prevent a substitute attendance by a third person with greater certainty, and confirm the attendance of the legitimate student with even greater reliability.

5 An attendance confirmation method according to an eighteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to any one of the eleventh through seventeenth preferred embodiments, wherein the step of detecting the action has a step of determining whether image
10 changes occur within a specified time from requesting to perform an action by the step of requesting an action.

According to this preferred embodiment, it is possible to determine non-attendance of the legitimate student if the required image changes do not occur within a predetermined
15 time of the action being requested. Accordingly, even assuming that it were possible to generate video and the like corresponding to the action request at the terminal, the substitute attendee can be denied sufficient time to prepare such video, and it is therefore possible to confirm that the
20 legitimate student is in attendance with even greater certainty.

An attendance confirmation method according to a nineteenth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation method according to any one of the eleventh through eighteenth
25 preferred embodiments, wherein the step of requesting an

action uses unpredictable timing when requesting the student to perform an action.

According to this preferred embodiment, because the student cannot predict when an action request will occur, the 5 student cannot leave the student terminal during a lecture, which provides an incentive to ensure that the student is continuously in attendance throughout the entire lecture.

An attendance confirmation method according to a twentieth preferred embodiment is an attendance confirmation 10 method according to any one of the eleventh through nineteenth preferred embodiments, wherein the step of requesting an action requests the student to perform an action based on a command by the lecturer.

According to this preferred embodiment, because the 15 lecturer can control the timing with which action requests are issued to students, attendance confirmation can be performed without adversely impacting the learning of the student.

An attendance confirmation program according to a twenty-first aspect is a program for executing, on a computer, an 20 attendance confirmation method according to any one of the eleventh through twentieth preferred embodiment.

By equipping a computer system with a program for executing each of the steps of an attendance confirmation method according to any one of the eleventh through twentieth 25 preferred embodiments, it is possible to prevent a substitute

attendee by a third person and confirm that the legitimate students are in attendance in a remote education setting.

These and other elements, steps, characteristics, features and advantages of the invention will be more readily 5 apparent from the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the present invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 Fig. 1 is a system configuration diagram of a remote education system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing an example of a screen displayed on a student terminal by a remote education system 15 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart (1 of 3) of an attendance confirmation program of a remote education system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is a flowchart (2 of 3) of the attendance confirmation program of the remote education system according 20 to the preferred embodiment of the present invention; and

Fig. 5 is a flowchart (3 of 3) of the attendance confirmation program of the remote education system according to the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1 is a system configuration diagram of a remote education system according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention. In the diagram, the reference numeral 1 indicates a remote education system. The system 1 includes a Web server 10, a bidirectional communication server 20, a content distribution server 30, an operations management system 40, a lecturer terminal 60 which is used by a lecturer, and a communication line connecting device 70, which are all connected together by a network. The remote education system is connecting to student terminals 101, 102, and so on, used by students, via a communication line 2, when remote education services are provided.

The Web server 10 is a WWW server which acts as a mediator when using the present system, and tasks such as the setting and progression of lectures, as well as attendance related procedures, can be performed by using a web browser to access a predetermined page from either the lecturer terminal 60, or the student terminals 101, 102, and so on.

The bidirectional communication server 20 includes a connection destination table for storing the terminal addresses of terminals that are connected to the system, and connects to terminals that are registered in this connection destination table, providing a bidirectional communication function based on multimedia information including video and

audio. During a lecture, the terminal addresses of the lecturer terminal 60 and the student terminals 101, 102, and so on, used by the students who are attending the lecture are registered in the connection destination table. The 5 bidirectional communication server 20 then receives video and audio sent from the lecturer terminal 60, as well as video and audio sent from the student terminals 101, 102, and so on, integrates the received video and audio, and transmits the result to the lecturer terminal 60 and the student terminals 10 101, 102, and so on.

The content distribution server 30 includes an educational material database 23 for storing multimedia educational material including moving images, still images, audio, text, and sound effects. The server 30 provides a 15 function for distributing specified content to the terminals registered in the connection destination table. During a lecture, the terminal addresses of the lecturer terminal 60 and the student terminals 101, 102, and so on used by the students who are attending the lecture are registered in the 20 connection destination table, and the educational material content specified by the lecturer terminal 60 is distributed to each terminal.

The operations management system 40 is a system for managing the remote education operations, and includes a 25 lecture information database 50 for storing a variety of data

relating to the lectures to be provided, and performs data processing such as lecture establishment processing 41 for establishing lectures, attendance registration processing 42 for receiving attendance for the established lectures, lecture 5 opening processing 43 for opening the established lectures and attendance confirmation processing 44 for confirming student attendance of the opened lectures.

The lecturer terminal 60 includes a television camera (a) for acquiring video of the lecturer, a headset (b) for 10 inputting and outputting audio to and from the lecturer, a monitor screen (c) for displaying images, a keyboard (d) and a mouse (e) for inputting commands and messages, and a computer (f), which includes a video input interface, an audio input/output interface, and a network connection device. The 15 following programs are preferably installed on the computer: a video and audio communication program, which acquires video and audio of the lecturer and transmits this information to the bidirectional communication server 20, and also outputs video and audio sent from the bidirectional communication 20 server 20 to the monitor screen and the headset, respectively, a content display program for outputting images and audio distributed from the content distribution server 30 to the monitor screen and the headset, and a web browser for accessing the Web server 10.

25 The communication line 2 may be adapted to any type of

communication line including a wired computer network, a wireless computer network, a telephone line, a satellite line, and the Internet, although in the following description, the Internet is used as an example. Accordingly, the communication line connecting device 70 uses an internet router for connecting to the Internet.

The student terminals 101, 102, and so on, are similar to the lecturer terminal 60, and each include a television camera (a) for acquiring video of the student, a headset (b) for inputting and outputting audio to and from the student, a monitor screen (c) for displaying images, a keyboard (d) and a mouse (e) for inputting commands and messages, and a computer (f), which includes a video input interface, an audio input/output interface, and a network connection device. The following programs are installed on the computer: a video and audio communication program, which acquires video and audio of the student and transmits this information to the bidirectional communication server 20, and also outputs video and audio sent from the bidirectional communication server 20 to the monitor screen and the headset, respectively, a content display program for outputting images and audio distributed from the content distribution server 30 to the monitor screen and the headset, and a web browser for accessing the Web server 10.

Next, the steps of implementing remote education using

the remote education system 1 according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention are described.

First, the administration office presenting the remote education accesses the page for the office on the Web server 5 10 from either the lecturer terminal 60 or a dedicated office terminal (not shown in the figure), and then decides and inputs the lectures which are to be established, based on the academic calendar and the corresponding lecturer schedules. As a result, a lecture schedule database 51 is constructed in the 10 lecture information database 50 by the lecture establishment processing 41 of the operations management system 40, and an attendance record is generated for each lecture and registered in an attendance record database 52.

The administration office then begins student recruitment, 15 and issues an ID and password for accessing the Web server 10 to each student who satisfies a predetermined standard for enrollment. Each student issued with an ID and password accesses the student page on the Web server 10 from his or her student terminal and registers his or her personal information, 20 registers a facial image used to match facial images when confirming attendance, and registers an audio file that is used to match audio responses to questions relating to personal information when confirming attendance.

During the registration of personal information, the attendance registration processing 42 of the operations

management system 40 registers various information, such as, for example, the name, age, gender, date of birth, address, telephone number, e-mail address, and other useful information input by each student in the personal information database 53 5 of the lecture information database 50, together with the ID and password for that student, and the terminal address of each student terminal. Furthermore, a determination as to whether the student who wants to attend the lecture can attend the lecture or not is made by referring to the lecture schedule database 51, and if attendance is possible, then the student in question is registered in the attendance record of the relevant lecture in the attendance record database 52.

During the facial image registration, the attendance registration processing 42 of the operations management system 40 sets the terminal address of the relevant student terminal and the address of the operations management system in the connection destination table of the bidirectional communication server 20, and records a frame of video as a still image at the time when the student clicks a facial image registration button (not shown in the figure) provided on the web page, and then registers this still image in the facial image database 54 of the lecture information database 50.

During the audio registration, the attendance registration processing 42 of the operations management system 40 sets the terminal address of the relevant student terminal

and the address of the operations management system in the connection destination table of the bidirectional communication server 20, and acquires audio from the student when he or she clicks the audio registration button (not shown) provided for each item of personal information on the Web page, and then registers the acquired audio in the audio database 55 of the lecture information database 50 according to each item of personal information.

When the date and time of the lecture set in the lecture schedule database 51 arrives, the lecture is opened in the bidirectional communication server 20 and the content distribution server 30 by the lecture opening processing 43.

When the students of the lecture access the attendance reception page from the student terminals 101, 102, and so on, and check in using their predetermined IDs and passwords, the terminal addresses of the relevant student terminals are set in the connection destination table of the bidirectional communication server 20 and the distribution destination table of the content distribution server 30.

Furthermore, when the lecturer of the relevant lecture accesses the lecturer reception page on the Web server from the lecturer terminal 60, the terminal address of the lecturer terminal 60 is set in the connection destination table of the bidirectional communication server 20 and the distribution destination table of the content distribution server 30.

The attendance confirmation described below is performed by the attendance confirmation processing 44 of the operations management system 40 for the students who have checked in, and if the student is confirmed as a legitimate student, then the 5 time of attendance is recorded in the attendance record.

In this manner, the lecture begins, and the lecturer conducts the lecture from the lecturer terminal 60, distributing video and audio of the lecturer to the student terminals. Furthermore, the lecturer can control the content 1.0 distribution server 30 from the lecturer terminal 60, via the Web server 10, and by searching the educational material database 32 for the necessary educational material and then playing back the material, the relevant educational material is distributed to the students.

15 Fig. 2 shows an example of the screen which appears on the monitor screen of the student terminals 101, 102, and so on, during the lecture. In Fig. 2, symbol A indicates the lecturer screen for displaying video of the lecturer sent from the lecturer terminal 60, and symbol B indicates the student 20 screen for displaying video of the students sent from the student terminals 101, 102, and so on, together with their names. The reason that the names of the students are displayed in the student screen B is so that the lecturer can request a comment or a response from a specific student using his or her 25 name.

Symbol C indicates the content screen for displaying content distributed from the content distribution server 30, and a pointer can be displayed on the content screen C by an operation from the lecturer terminal 60, and this pointer can 5 be used to indicate points of interest to the students when describing the contents of the educational material being presented.

Symbol D indicates an input screen for receiving input when the student makes a comment, responds to a question asked 10 by the lecturer, or leaves in midcourse and exits the lecture, and symbol E indicates a message screen for displaying messages to the students from the lecturer terminal and the operations management system. The messages issued to the student when the attendance confirmation processing 44 15 confirms the attendance of the student are displayed in this message screen E.

The display on the monitor screen of the lecturer terminal 60 is the same as that of the monitor screen of the student terminals, with the exception that the command input 20 screen D also includes buttons for controlling the search for, and reproduction of, content distributed by the content distribution server 30, as well as control buttons for the pointer displayed in the content screen C.

During the lecture, students may ask questions or make 25 comments to the lecturer by clicking the speak button. When a-

student clicks the speak button, the student flickers in the student screen B, and the lecturer can accept the comment by clicking the display of that student from the lecturer terminal. At this time, the video of the relevant student is scaled up for distribution to the lecturer terminal and to each student terminal, and the audio of the relevant student is also distributed to the lecturer terminal and the other student terminals. As a result, the relevant student can converse with the lecturer using video and audio, and the contents of the conversation are also transmitted to the other students.

Furthermore, during the lecture, the lecturer can also set questions for all of the students or a specific student to answer. When a student or students specified by the lecturer either click a selection button or input a message into the message box and click the respond button, the contents of the response are transmitted to the operations management system 40 via the Web server 10, and the aggregated results are displayed on the lecturer terminal 60. Furthermore, the lecturer can also display those aggregated results to the students, if necessary, such that the aggregated results are distributed to the student terminals via the content distribution server 30 on an instruction from the lecturer terminal 60.

During the lecture, attendance confirmation is performed.

as needed by the attendance confirmation processing 44 of the operations management system 40 in the manner described below, thus, enabling confirmation that the legitimate students are in attendance.

5 When a student needs to leave in midcourse for a toilet break or the like, he or she clicks the leave seat button. In this case, the image of the relevant student in the student screen B changes to an away mark, and the time when he or she left is recorded in the attendance record. Furthermore, when
10 the student returns, he or she clicks the take seat button. As a result, the away mark of the relevant student in the student screen B returns to normal, and the time when he or she returned is recorded in the attendance record. Furthermore, each student clicks the exit button at the end of the lecture
15 or if he or she wishes to exit the lecture early. As a result, the time when the student exits is recorded in the attendance record, and the terminal address of the relevant student is deleted from the connection destination table and the distribution destination table, thereby terminating the
20 attendance of the student.

 In this manner, the lecturer can accurately ascertain the attendance status, and because the arrival time, exit time, leave times, and return times are recorded automatically in the attendance record, it is possible to ascertain the actual
25 attendance time for the lecture in question. In particular, in

the remote education system 1 according to this preferred embodiment, because attendance confirmation for each student may be performed at any time by the attendance confirmation processing 44, it is expected that students will be very .5 careful about managing their attendance time at lectures, to avoid being marked as absent.

In addition, the bidirectional communication server 20 includes an application sharing function which can run a common application between the lecturer terminal and the 10 student terminals and exchange information on the operations performed at each terminal between the terminals, thereby sharing the application between all participants. Consequently, it is possible to implement a lecture in the form of a seminar in which a common whiteboard on which text and graphics can be 15 drawn is displayed on the screen of each terminal, and the discussion progresses with the lecturer and the students . adding text and graphics freely to the whiteboard.

Furthermore, a function is also provided whereby a chat 20 screen is displayed on each terminal, and text-based conversation or discussion takes place between the lecturer and the students.

In this manner, according to the remote education system 1 of this preferred embodiment, each student can receive video and audio of the lecturer from the bidirectional communication 25 server 20, while receiving multimedia educational material

distributed from the content distribution server 30, and the lecturer can set questions for the students and request responses, or accept questions or comments from students and establish a conversation based on audio and video using the 5 bidirectional communication server 20. Consequently, the same level of teaching effectiveness can be obtained as if the students were given a lesson in a lecture room using common educational materials, even though each student is in a distant location.

10 In the preferred embodiment described above, video of each student is preferably displayed in the student screen B, but it is also possible to use an icon based display, in which a still image is displayed except when the student asks a question or makes a comment to the lecturer. As a result, even 15 if the communication line has limited bandwidth, remote education can still be implemented without placing a large burden on the communication lines.

Furthermore, in the preferred embodiment described above, the name of each student is displayed in the student screen B. 20 However, it is also possible to display only video or an icon of each student in the student screen B, and to provide the attendance record corresponding to the student screen to the lecturer terminal separately.

In the preferred embodiment described above, the 25 description focused on the case of a manned lecture, where the

lecture is performed live by a lecturer, but it is also possible to set up unmanned lectures, which are performed using a lecture video. In this case, the lecture video is created in advance by the administration office, and is 5 registered in the educational material database 32 of the content distribution server 30, and the lecture video to be used is set in the lecture schedule database 51. When the date and time of the lecture arrives, the lecture opening processing 43 of the operations management system 40 specifies 10 the lecture video for distribution by the content distribution server 30, and starts the lecture automatically. Appropriate questions are set within the lecture video, and the responses of the students to these questions are collected and recorded automatically. Furthermore, if the students have questions or 15 the like, they can send them to the administration office by e-mail, where they are forwarded to the lecturer concerned and answered at a later time.

Next, the attendance confirmation processing 44 of the operations management system 40 is described in detail.

20 The attendance confirmation processing 44 includes a student image acquisition processing 45 for acquiring an image of each student transmitted from each student terminal, a facial image matching processing 46 for matching the acquired image of each student with the facial image of that student in 25 the facial image database 54, an action request processing 47

for requesting, of each student who passes facial image matching, an action accompanying changes in the image transmitted from the student terminal, and an action detection processing 48 for detecting changes in the image transmitted

5 from the student terminals in response to the requested action.

In the present preferred embodiment, three kinds of actions,

for example, are preferably requested of each student such as

moving the head position as instructed, giving the current

time verbally, and answering a question relating to personal

10 information verbally.

Fig. 3 through Fig. 5 show the processing flow of the attendance confirmation processing 44.

When the attendance confirmation time arrives (S100), an attendance confirmation request is sent to the lecturer

15 terminal 60 (S102), and when the lecturer acknowledges the

attendance confirmation request, attendance confirmation is

performed (S104). The start of the lecture and a random time

during the lecture are chosen as attendance confirmation times.

Performing attendance confirmation at a random time during the

20 lecture ensures that the students cannot predict when

attendance confirmation will occur, which provides an

incentive to ensure that the students are continuously in

attendance throughout the entire lecture. However, because it

may be disruptive to perform attendance confirmation while the

25 lecturer is in the middle of performing the lecture, the

attendance confirmation request is first sent to the lecturer, and attendance confirmation is performed only after the lecturer suspends the lecture and clicks the acknowledge button for the attendance confirmation request. In the case of 5 an unmanned lecture using a lecture video, attendance confirmation may be performed, for example, by registering points where interruption is possible in the lecture video, and pausing playback of the lecture video at the first point where interruption is possible after the attendance 10 confirmation request is issued.

If the attendance confirmation time has not yet been reached, the flow proceeds to S406 and repeats until the lecture ends.

Next, the attendance record for the relevant lecture is 15 acquired from the attendance record database 52 (S106), the terminal addresses of the student terminals of the students registered in the attendance record are sent to the bidirectional communication server 20, video and audio of the relevant students is acquired (S108), and a notification of 20 facial image confirmation is sent to the relevant student terminals (S110). For example, the message "We will now confirm your attendance. Please present your face to the camera as you did when registering attendance" is displayed in the message screen. At this time, it is possible to add the 25 message "click here when ready" such that the Web server 10

detects when "here" is clicked, enabling the flow to proceed to the next step.

Facial image data for each student is then retrieved from the personal information database 53 (S112), and a still image ,5 of the student, extracted from the video that is currently being acquired, is matched with the facial image data of that student (S114). In image matching, direct matching processing of the acquired video of the student is performed using the facial image data of the relevant student as a template, to 1.0 determine the point with the highest degree of correlation. It is also possible to perform matching processing after normalizing the image size of the still image extracted from the acquired video of the student using a feature extraction calculation, which determines the size of the outside contour 15 of the face, or the position or shape of the eyes, nose, or mouth, and it is also possible to compare the results of feature extraction calculation for the facial image data of the relevant student.

As a result of the image matching, if a predetermined 20 degree of correlation is obtained, then the flow proceeds to the next step (S116), whereas if a predetermined degree of correlation is not obtained, a confirmation message is sent to the relevant student terminal (S118). If there is a response to the message, the flow returns to step S110 and the facial 25 image confirmation request is repeated (S120), whereas if

there is no response, the flow proceeds to S408 and the student is marked as absent in the attendance record.

Next, facial movement confirmation is performed. First, the initial position of the face of the student in the 5 extracted still image is detected (S122). The position of the face is determined as the point where the degree of correlation is highest for the matching processing performed in the facial matching described above.

A facial movement request is then sent to the relevant 10 student terminals (S124). For example, a message such as "Please move your face approximately 10 cm to the right" is displayed in the message screen. The direction in which the face is to be moved and the movement distance can be changed at random, as appropriate. As a result, it is almost 15 impossible to achieve image confirmation using video that has been prepared in advance, which prevents substitute attendance by a third person.

Here, facial position detection of each student is performed in a continuous manner on the acquired video from 20 the student, using the image matching described above (S126), and when a change in the position of the face that corresponds to the above message is detected, the flow proceeds to the next step (S128). Furthermore, if a change in the position of the face is not detected within a predetermined time (S130), a 25 confirmation message is sent to the relevant student terminal

(S132). If there is a response to the message, the flow returns to step S120 and the facial movement request is repeated (S134), whereas if there is no response, the flow proceeds to S408 and the relevant student is marked as absent 5 in the attendance record.

Next, time related audio response confirmation is performed. First, a time-based audio response request is sent to the relevant student terminals (S200). For example, a message such as "Please respond verbally with the current time 10 displayed in the lecturer screen" is displayed on the message screen. The audio response of each student is detected from the signal level of the audio being acquired from that student, and if a sequential audio response is detected (S202), video and audio is acquired during the audio response (S204). If a 15 predetermined time elapses before a sequential audio response is detected (S206), a confirmation message is sent to the relevant student terminal (S208). If there is a response to the message, the flow is repeated from S200 (S210), whereas if there is no response, the flow proceeds to S408 and the 20 relevant student is marked as absent in the attendance record.

Speech recognition is then performed on the audio acquired during the audio response (S212). Because, in this case, the object of the speech recognition is limited to recognition of a time, a matching process is preferably 25 performed in syllable units, using a speech dictionary

relating solely to time. Since there are only a limited number of words to identify, unspecified-speaker speech recognition using a speech dictionary based on recordings of an unspecified speaker may be used to recognize the speech, but 5 specified-speaker speech recognition, in which the student registers speech relating to the time in advance, and this pre-registered audio is then used as the speech dictionary, may also be used.

The current time displayed on the lecturer screen is then 10 acquired (S214), and if the time given by the speech recognition in the audio response is within a predetermined margin of error (S216), mouth movement is detected in the video acquired during the audio response (S218). In this mouth movement detection, shape parameters are determined for the 15 mouth by the feature extraction calculation described above, for those frames of the video which were acquired during the audio response and which correspond to each syllable identified by the speech recognition, and these parameters for each syllable are then compared with mouth shape parameters 20 obtained from a table that registers the relationship between syllables and mouth shape parameters, enabling an overall degree of correlation to be determined. Because the object of this mouth movement determination is to detect whether the video of the student subjected to facial image matching is 25 prerecorded video data, or whether the audio response giving

the time is prerecorded audio data, it is not necessary to determine exact correspondence, and for example, a simple method of detecting whether changes occur in the shape of the mouth of the student in the period where the audio response is detected may be used. Furthermore, when specified-speaker speech recognition is performed by having each student preregister audio relating to the time, it is possible to also register corresponding video of the student at the same time as he or she registers the audio, and then make the mouth movement determination by directly comparing the video of the student saying each syllable, as recognized by the speech recognition, with the corresponding pre-registered video of the student. Furthermore, it is also possible to make the mouth movement determination by determining and recording the mouth shape parameters from the video of the student when he or she registers audio relating to time, and then comparing these results with the mouth shape parameters determined from the video of the student acquired when he or she says each syllable, as recognized by the speech recognition.

Here, if a determination is made that the mouth movement of the student corresponds with the audio response, then the flow proceeds to the next step (S220). If a determination is made, at S216, that the time given in the audio response is incorrect, or a determination is made, at S220, that the video does not correspond with the audio response, then the flow

returns to S208 and a confirmation message is sent to the relevant student terminal. If there is a response, the flow repeats from S200.

In the above-described preferred embodiment, a situation 5 was described in which the time given as an audio response is subjected to speech recognition and compared to the current time, but it is also possible to sequentially extract syllable data corresponding to the current time from a speech dictionary and compare the data piece by piece with the audio 10 from the student acquired during the audio response, and then make a judgment that the time given in the audio response is correct if the predetermined degree of correlation is obtained during the entire audio response.

Next, audio response confirmation of personal information 15 of the student is performed. First, a question item relating to personal information is selected, and an audio response request for that personal information question item is then sent to the relevant student terminals (S300). For example, a message such as "Please respond verbally with your date of 20 birth" is displayed on the message screen. This question item relating to personal information is preferably chosen at random such that the students cannot predict the question. The audio response of each student is detected from the signal level of audio being acquired from that student, and if a 25 sequential audio response is detected (S302), video and audio --

are acquired during the audio response (S304). If a predetermined time elapses before a sequential audio response is detected (S306), a confirmation message is sent to the relevant student terminal (S308). If there is a response to 5 the message, the flow is repeated from S300 (S310), whereas if there is no response, the flow proceeds to S408 and the relevant student is marked as absent in the attendance record.

Next, the audio data corresponding to the question item relating to personal information of the relevant student is 10 retrieved from the audio database 55 (S312), and using this data as a template, matching processing is performed on the audio acquired during the audio response (S314). As a result, if a predetermined degree of correspondence is obtained (S316), mouth movement is detected in the acquired video of the audio 15 response (S318). In this mouth movement detection, shape parameters for the mouth are determined by the feature extraction calculation described above for the frames of the video acquired during the audio response, and these parameters are compared with mouth shape parameters obtained from a table 20 that records the relationship between mouth shape parameters and characters from the character data of the personal information of the relevant student recorded in the personal information database 53, and an overall degree of correlation is determined. Because the object of this mouth movement 25 determination, as with the time confirmation method used above,

is to detect whether the video of the student subjected to facial image matching is prerecorded video data, or whether the audio response giving the time is prerecorded video data, it is not necessary to determine exact correspondence, and for 5 example, a simple method of detecting whether changes occur in the shape of the mouth of the student in the period when the audio response is detected may be used. Furthermore, it is also possible to record video of the student at the same time as he or she registers the audio of the personal information, 10 and then make the mouth movement determination by directly comparing the video acquired during the audio response with the corresponding pre-registered video of the student. Furthermore, it is also possible to determine and record the mouth shape parameters as time series data from the video of 15 the student acquired when he or she registers the audio of the personal information, and then make the mouth movement determination by comparing the mouth shape parameters determined from the video of the audio response with the pre-registered mouth shape parameters. 20 Here, if a determination is made that the movement of the mouth of the student corresponds to the audio response, the flow proceeds to the next step (S320). If a determination is made, at step S316, that the personal information is incorrect, or at step S320, that the video does not correspond to the 25 audio response, the flow proceeds to S308, and a confirmation

message is sent to the relevant student terminal. If there is a response to the message, the flow is repeated from S300.

After the attendance confirmation processing is completed for each student, a notification of attendance confirmation completion is sent to the relevant student terminal (S400), and a notification is sent to the bidirectional communication server 20, which terminates video and audio acquisition for that student (S402).

After attendance confirmation is completed for all students (S404), the flow then repeats from the start (S100) until the lecture ends.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, facial image matching, facial movement confirmation, time related audio response confirmation, and personal information related audio response confirmation were all performed at each attendance confirmation time, but the present invention is not limited to this configuration, and any one of a combination of facial image matching and facial movement confirmation, a combination of facial image matching and time related audio response confirmation, and a combination of facial image matching and personal information related audio response confirmation may be implemented, or any of these may be chosen and implemented at random at the attendance confirmation time.

Furthermore, in the description of the above preferred embodiment, the actions requested of the student involved

moving his or her face or providing an audio response, but the present invention is not limited to these actions, and any action that can be recognized in terms of changes in the video, such as rotating the head, closing the eyes, raising a hand, 5 showing an object with a specific shape to the camera, or showing a piece of paper with a specific shape drawn thereon can be used to achieve the effect of the present invention.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, after facial image matching is performed, the actions for 10 facial movement confirmation, time related audio response confirmation, and personal information related audio response confirmation are requested, and a determination as to whether the legitimate student is in attendance is made by determining whether the image changes at that time correspond to the 15 request. However, it is also possible to provide a function for detecting the position of the face of the student continuously and confirm that the position of the face does not change in a discontinuous manner. As a result, if a substitute attendee, upon receiving an action request, 20 switches to a pre-recorded video corresponding to the action request, then the position of the face of the student will move in a discontinuous manner, making it is possible to detect the third person attendance, and the attendance of the legitimate student can therefore be confirmed with even 25 greater reliability.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, every student attends the lecture from a student terminal, and no students attend the lecture of the lecturer in person, but it is also possible to set up a lecture which mixes both on-site students and remote students, where lectures are conducted in a lecture site equipped with a large screen display device for displaying video sent from the bidirectional communication server 20, and loudspeakers for outputting the audio sent from the bidirectional communication server 20.

Furthermore, it is possible to also provide satellite lecture sites in various locations, with large screen display devices and loudspeakers provided therein, and treat the students gathered in the satellite lecture sites as a single gathering of students.

As a result, students who are capable of traveling to the lecture site or the satellite lecture site can attend in person, and students who cannot travel can attend remotely, and as such, it is possible for a greater number of students to simultaneously attend a lecture by a single lecturer. In this case, it goes without saying that terminals which have an input function for answering questions, and video input and audio input functions for attendance confirmation may also be provided for the students at the lecture site and the students at the satellite lecture sites.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, the remote education system includes a content distribution server, and the educational materials used in the lecture are distributed to each student terminal by the content distribution server. However, the present invention is not limited to this configuration, and it is possible to simply run educational software on the screen or the like of the lecturer terminal, and then, capture this software using the camera which acquires video of the lecturer. Furthermore, it is also possible to provide external video and audio input terminals on the lecture terminal, and connect a VTR or DVD or the like to the terminals, and then either combine the video and audio of the educational software played by the lecturer with video and audio of the lecturer, or switch between the two, and send the results to the bidirectional communication server, which then distributes the data to each student terminal.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, the lecturer terminal is connected to an internal network of the remote education system. However, the present invention is not limited to this configuration, and the lecturer terminal may be connected to the remote education system via the Internet. As a result, the lecturer can conduct a lecture from anywhere as long as he or she has a lecturer terminal capable of connecting to the Internet, which enables people living

overseas to be invited to be a lecturer, and also simplifies scheduling and reduces personnel expenses.

In the description of the above preferred embodiment, the remote education system includes a Web server, and the student terminals perform tasks relating to attendance by accessing the Web server using a computer with a Web browser function.

However, the present invention is not limited to this configuration, and by using a normal videophone as the student terminal, transmission of messages from the operations

10 management system to the student terminals can be achieved by incorporating message images in the bidirectional communication server and sending the result to the student

terminal, and the input of commands and messages to the operations management system from the student terminal can be

15 achieved by providing a function for using the dialing buttons of the user terminal, and having the bidirectional communication server detect the PB tone signals. As a result,

a telephone-type videophone terminal that connects to a public telephone line, such as an ISDN videophone in accordance with

20 the ITU-T recommended H.320 protocol or an IP (Internet Protocol) type videophone terminal that connects to the

Internet, such as an IP videophone terminal in accordance with the ITU-T recommended H.323 protocol, can be used. In this

case, video codecs and audio codecs corresponding to the

25 protocol of the student terminals must be provided on the

bidirectional communication server, but by providing a gateway which performs protocol conversion, it is possible to have a mixture of student terminals based on various protocols.

As described above, the present invention prevents a 5 substitute attendance by a third person using prerecorded video and the like, and enables confirmation that the legitimate student is in attendance.

While preferred embodiments of the invention have been described above, it is to be understood that variations and 10 modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art without departing the scope and spirit of the invention. The scope of the invention, therefore, is to be determined solely by the following claims.